

# The Sore Spot of the Old World: The Near East

## Europe Is Now Disputing Over the Settlement of the Turkish Problem

By Frank H. Simonds

**A**FTER the Conference of Paris we are to have a conference of London. Such is the announcement now coming from Europe. This new conference will have a vital interest for Americans, because it will deal with the Turkish problem, deliberately placed at one side in Paris pending the outcome of the debate in the United States Senate over the league of nations phases of the Treaty of Versailles.

At Paris Europe derived from the American representatives the clear impression that the United States was prepared to take one and possibly two mandates—that is, that in accordance with the provisions of the league of nations we were willing to undertake the responsibility of protecting and developing countries incapable alike of self-defense or independent existence.

Europe understood this to be the clear and prevailing opinion in America and accepted it as assured that the United States would assume the mandates for Constantinople and for Armenia. Neither the President nor Colonel House indicated anything but approval of such a course, while both pointed out that the actual decision in the matter of mandates would have to await the decision of the United States Senate.

The opposition which has developed in the United States to the league of nations covenant, as adopted in Paris, took the European world by surprise. It had never counted upon effective opposition; it had conducted its negotiations with the assurance that, even though there might be superficial political objection, the country at large would support the President and the President would have no difficulty in overwhelming political opposition by a direct appeal to the people themselves. At the beginning of June, when I left Paris, the opposition to the President in the United States was regarded by all Europe and the representatives at Paris as quite negligible.

That the President favored an American mandate, that he looked with sympathy upon two mandates, those of Constantinople and Armenia, was well known in Paris and no secret was made of this fact by his associates, notably Colonel House. Neither the President nor Colonel House could commit the United States to the acceptance of a mandate and neither, of course, undertook any such promise, but what Europe gathered was that if the President won in the matter of the treaty, and victory was assured after a possible delay incident to an appeal to the American people, then America would participate in the settlement of the Turkish problem.

### A Postponement

But pending the American decision it was inevitable that the Turkish problem should be postponed. The result has been that any general settlement has been postponed. But in the absence of any general solution many partial arrangements have been made and practically the whole of the seacoast, together with the so-called Arabic provinces of Turkey, has been occupied by European nations. Moreover, save in the cases of Constantinople and Armenia, these occupations have begun to assume a more or less permanent character.

Thus, at the moment when it appears, at least superficially, to be the will of the American people that no mandate be accepted by them,

the Turkish problem assumes a far different status from that which existed one year ago, when the collapse of the Central Powers led to the armistice and to the Conference of Paris. Instead of having before it the Turkish problem, complicated only by secret treaties not yet put into actual operation, as was the case at Paris, the London conference will have to deal with situations created by the partial application of the secret treaties. It will also have to deal with the consequences of a rapid extension of rivalry and bad feeling between all the associated and allied powers in Turkey.

To explain this situation it will be necessary first of all to go back to the secret treaties. Early in the war the British made a treaty with the Arabs (who constitute the mass of the population in the Turkish Empire south of the highlands of Anatolia and Armenia in the regions from the Gulf of Alexandretta southward along the seacoast) by which Britain pledged herself, subject to a recognition of French interests, to aid in the restoration of an Arab state which should include Aleppo, Bagdad and Damascus and, in general, Syria and Mesopotamia.

### Spheres of Influence

At a later time France and Great Britain made a treaty which divided this same area into spheres of influence. Both countries recognized the possible creation of an autonomous Palestine, between the sea and the Jordan, while Britain agreed the French should have as a sphere of political and economic influence the regions north of a line drawn from the vicinity of Tyre on the Mediterranean to Tekrit on the Tigris and extending in the north from the Gulf of Alexandretta to Sivas and Diabekr in the Armenian highlands. Other concessions were made to Russia, but these no longer have value, as a result of the Russian collapse.

Finally, when Italy entered the war, the same Treaty of London which assigned Trieste and a portion of Dalmatia to the Italians gave them a third region of economic and political activity extending westward along the coast of Anatolia from the French sphere and including the port and district of Adalia. It was, moreover, stipulated that if French and British spheres were increased the Italians might claim a similar expansion.

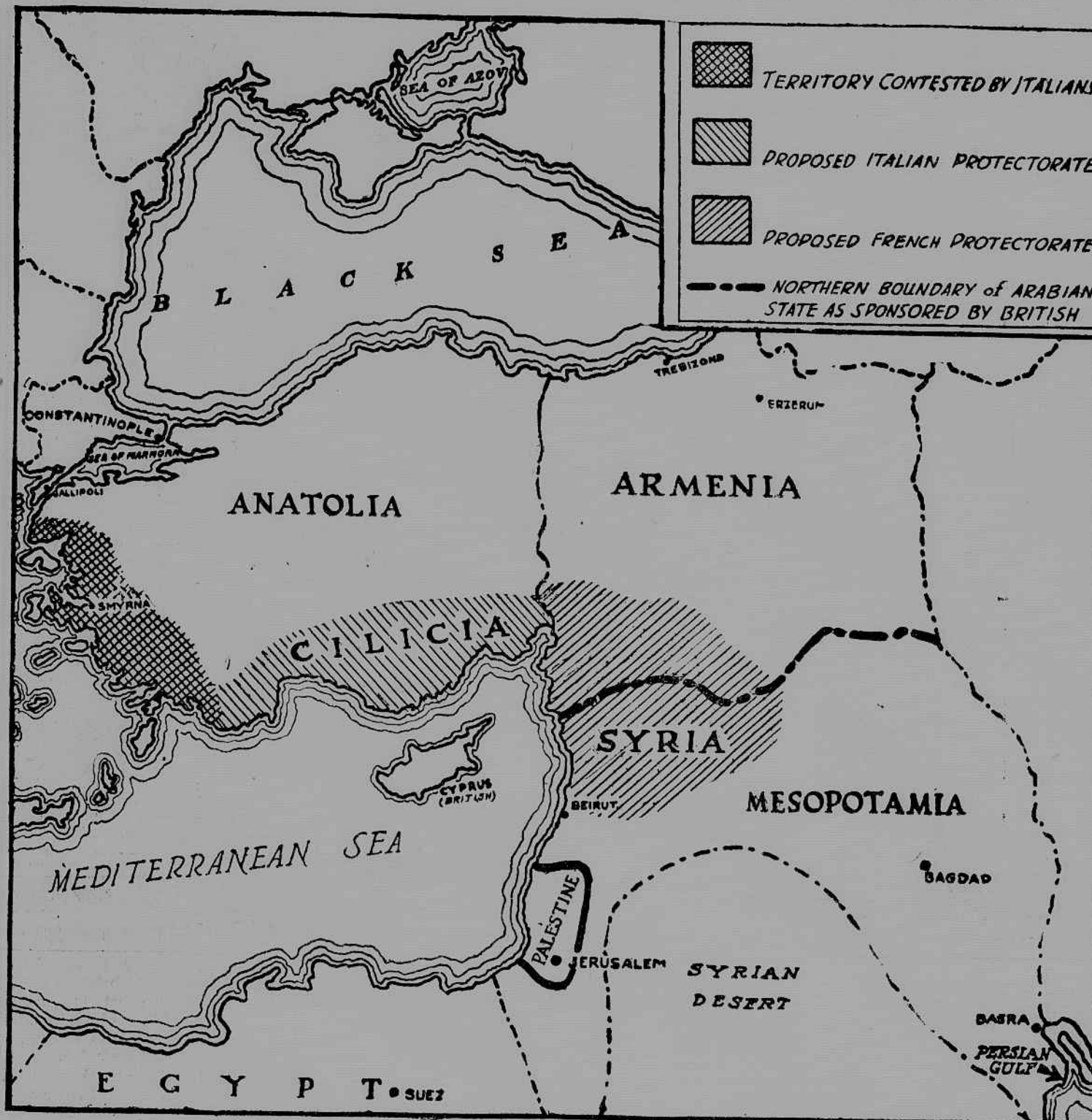
### An Arab State

Now, the spirit of the first treaty, that with the Arabs, was that there should be re-created a great, more or less independent, Arab state, occupying all of the old Turkish territory south of Armenia and Anatolia and under the control of the King of the Hedjaz, whose own state was before the war limited to a small area about the holy cities of Mecca and Medina on the Red Sea littoral. This treaty was designed to enlist the Arabs in a revolt against the Turks and to assure to British armies operating from Egypt and India, in Palestine and Mesopotamia, necessary Arab assistance.

This object was achieved; the Arabs rendered invaluable assistance both to Maude and to Allenby and made possible the decisive victory of the latter on the Plain of Armageddon which broke Turkish power. But once the victory was assured the Arabs, relying upon British promises, demanded that they should be permitted to occupy the whole of the Arab-inhabited regions and set their faces resolutely against the creation of any French protectorate.

It was to assure this solution that

## Where the Old Rivalries Persist



Prince Feisal, the son of the King of the Hedjaz, who had made the campaign with the British and had always kept with him Colonel Lawrence, a British soldier, who won great and deserved fame in the Arab fighting, came to the Paris Conference. He not only insisted upon British support, but appealed to the Americans, basing his appeal on a declaration made by the French and the British after the Turkish collapse, that neither sought political or, more exactly, territorial objectives in Arab regions, as well as upon the Fourteen Points.

Not unnaturally the British sympathized with their Arab allies, while American sympathy was in a measure enlisted as a consequence of the opinions of American educators and missionaries in Syria, notably those from the American College at Beirut. But it was manifest from the start that whatever the British motives, the French were bound to oppose any solution which excluded them from Syria and, in fact, transformed the whole Arab world into a British protectorate.

French interests in Beirut and in the Syrian hinterland were very considerable. France, from the days of the Crusades, had remained the power exercising protector's rights over the Syrian Christians, notably in the Lebanon, and there was a strong Francophile party in certain districts of Syria. France, having borne the burden of the battle in Europe, naturally objected to seeing the British carry off the great colonial gains, the fruits of British battles, to be sure, but of battles fought by British troops who could not have been spared from the Western front had France not supplied the main bulk of troops in Europe.

It would be inaccurate to say that the quarrels which ensued in Paris and supplied one of the most dangerous elements in the whole situation grew out of intentional bad faith on the part of the British; rather they were the natural outcome of the situation which had developed. But it was not less clear that if the Arabians, who had British sympathy and a degree of support and were able to enlist not a little American sympathy, were able to realize their aspiration France would suffer and Britain would gain immeasurably; in reality, France

would be crowded out of Syria by the British as she had been crowded out of Egypt a generation before, and all Arabia, new and old, become in fact a British sphere of influence.

### A Modus Vivendi

In the end a sort of *modus vivendi* was agreed upon and at the present moment General Gouraud, the victor of the Battle of Champagne, in July, 1918, and until recently commanding the troops in Alsace-Lorraine, has just embarked to take over the command of French troops, who will hold Beirut and the seacoast to Alexandretta, in conformity with the Anglo-French treaty, but will not attempt to occupy the inland cities of Aleppo and Damascus until the Arab question has been cleared up by direct negotiation with the Arabs. As for the British, they remain in occupation of Jerusalem, Bagdad and the regions

south of Syria taken during the war.

But it must be clear that this temporary arrangement cannot last. Either the British and the French will have to agree to an absolute partition of the Arab lands, with an inevitable conflict with the Arabs themselves, or they will have to consent to an evacuation of all but the seacoast towns of Beirut for the French and Basra for the British and the joint recognition of a great, independent Arab state extending from the Armenian highlands to the Indian Ocean and from the Mediterranean to Persia. Even this latter solution would hardly last, for the British would be menaced in Egypt by the rise of any real Arab state.

So much for the Arab problem. But the French sphere of influence not merely includes Arab territory, but extends northward from the Gulf of Alexandretta and the Cilician Plain, claimed by the Armenians as essential to the new Armenia,

and also between Sivas and Diabekr affects regions which have hitherto been regarded as belonging to any Armenian state which might be created.

### Armenian Mandate

Thus, if the United States undertook an Armenian mandate it would find itself at once called upon to insist on French evacuation of Armenian lands, and, if it accepted Armenian claims to Adana and the Cilician area, to a still further considerable curtailment of French claims. Nor is this all, for eastward, in territories once Russian, dwell the main mass of surviving Armenians and an American protectorate there would clash with Russia should Russia ever regain unity, and with the Georgians and other native races, who also lay claim to the British lands which contain the great oil districts about Batum, one of the prizes of the economic world.

But the Syrian or, more exactly, the Arab and Armenian phases are but two of the complications. Even more sharply than the British and French have clashed between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, the Italians and the Greeks have quarreled along the Aegean coast. Italy has landed troops at Adalia and occupied the seacoast. She claims, also, the right to seize Smyrna, the great port of Asia Minor, but the Greeks, backed by the Paris Conference, provoked fighting with the Turks, who are still to be reckoned with.

Meantime the Italians continue to hold the islands of Rhodes and the Dodecanese, which are purely Greek in population but were taken by the Italians in the Libyan war and assigned permanently to them in their Treaty of London bargain with the Entente which preceded their entrance into the World War. Now, the Greeks have certain undeniable claims in Asia Minor. From the dawn of history the west coast has been Hellenic and it was Athenian protection of these Greek cities in Asia which provoked the Persian invasion.

### The Hinterland

As for the Italians, they have no claim based upon race or language and only shadowy historical claims

## An American Mandate in Armenia Is Fraught With Great Danger

flowing from temporary Venetian occupation of certain of the Aegean Islands. Yet even if a decision could be made of the seacoast between the Greeks, who have rights, and the Italians, who have Anglo-French consent and military strength, there would remain the question of the hinterland, where some eight million Turks constitute the bulk of the population and retain measurable capacity for fighting their enemies, if not for governing themselves.

A separation of the Arab provinces from the Osmanli would be relatively easy. Syria and Anatolia have been more often separate than united in history, but to parcel the seafront of Anatolia between the Greek and the Italian, mutually hostile, would mean nothing more than licensing a new war in which the Turks would infallibly resist Italian and Greek invasion of the hinterland to the death, and the Greeks and the Italians would inevitably come to blows, since the Italians have deliberately adopted the rôle of oppressor of the Greeks in Europe, in the Aegean Islands and on the coast of Asia Minor.

Nor is it less certain that if the United States should undertake the mandate for Armenia, in addition to conflict with French, Russian and not impossibly British aspirations we should find ourselves called upon to protect the Armenian remnant from the Turks and Kurds who today, as a result of the massacres, constitute an actual majority in the whole of Turkish Armenia.

### The Hellenic World

There remains the question of Constantinople. It is possible to separate the city from all political association with any European or Asiatic state, to transform it into a free city and to include within its frontiers, on the lines of the old District of Columbia, the shores of the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora. Given decent government, the city could be made one of the most beautiful in the world, and there are those who regret that the Conference of Paris did not make the town the capital of the league of nations and thus an international town.

But for such a considerable task the United States could expect no financial return, nor, what is far worse, any certainty of world applause. In the first place, once the Turk were evicted, the largest element in the population would be Greek and this element would, beyond all doubt, with ever-growing passion demand reunion with the rest of the Hellenic world. Moreover, in creating an internationalized area about the straits we should deprive Greece of many thousands of Hellenes. The whole experiment would be made at the expense of the Greek nationality. To be sure, even the Greeks might be complaisant, if they were satisfied that American occupation, like the Allied occupation of Crete, was only temporary. Yet the Cretan experiment was hardly happy.

Aside from the Greek phase there is always the Russian. Russia may reintegrate; if she does, the old longing for Constantinople will return and we shall find ourselves standing in the pathway of Russian ambition at Constantinople, and, if we take the Armenian mandate, in Asia Minor as well. Thus the French and the Russians, as well as the Greeks, are sure to resent our presence. Nor will the Bulgarians, who still cherish the dream of possessing Byzantium, held for a thousand years, be more friendly. Oddly enough, in proof of this peril, at least one great Paris journal last winter, when an American mandate for Constantinople was suggested, openly charged that American imperialism was thus at last disclosed.

thons would not extinguish their plans?

In Paris, at least, last winter, the mere suggestion of an American mandate for Constantinople called forth an instant accusation on one side, if it was applauded by others who more accurately appraised American reluctance to enter and the absence of any material profit for America in such a venture. Moreover, it is quite certain that, once embarked, we should not find that our own commercial and industrial elements, following their natural and thoroughly justifiable bent, would enter into rivalry with British, French and Italian, and in the end, as has happened in all other protectorates, involve us in actual commercial rivalry with European powers and ultimately in the necessity to defend by force of arms and for selfish reasons what we had occupied from the highest motives?

### Problem for America

In any event it seems to me unlikely that France, Britain and Italy, to say nothing of Greece, will consent to evacuate all of the old Turkish empire to make way for an American mandate for the whole area. Even if they did we should have to send at least a quarter of a million troops to Asia to garrison and police the territory, at least until we could organize native troops, which would mean a period of several years.

Eliminating the question of a total mandate, it seems possible, even certain, that at the new conference of London America will be invited to take a mandate for Constantinople and for Armenia. Not impossibly the French and the British will be prepared to make sacrifices from their spheres of interest to satisfy American ideas as to the proper extent of Armenia, while all but the Greeks will assent to our occupation of Constantinople, and even the Greeks will offer no real objection, believing, not too optimistically, that in the end American occupation will prove only a step in the reassertion of Hellenic influence in Byzantium.

But this does not touch the real problem. If the division of the Arab lands between the French and British is accepted by the Arab, which is doubtful, the millions of Anatolian Turks will never permit the Italians to conquer and hold Anatolia without desperate resistance, and Italian occupation of Adalia and the Aegean islands must inevitably be the prelude to such an effort.

### Italian Aspirations

"The vice of the Eastern question to-day arises from the entrance of Italy as a predatory influence in Anatolia. To realize Italian aspirations Italy must permanently stifle legitimate Greek aspirations, must conquer territories and hold the Turkish population in subjection. Moreover, so far as Italy is concerned, it means a new and terrible drain upon Italian resources, with no commensurate rewards in honor, influence or prosperity. But for the Italian phase, an arrangement between the Greeks and Turks might be possible, restricting the Greeks to the coastlands, indisputably Hellenic, and assuring to the Turks precisely such access to the sea and world commerce as the Greeks, who are the real traders of the Near East, would in the nature of things provide on their own initiative.

Of all conceivable mandates, that of Constantinople would be the simplest, taken by itself, but it is idle to close one's eyes to the fact that so far from solving the Turkish problem, the World War has really only added new complications, and, even in Constantinople, proximity to the tinder-box might have dangers immediate and eventual. Meantime the promise of a conference of London reveals the bankruptcy of Paris, so far as the Eastern question is concerned, while the recent developments in the Near East disclose the extent of the difficulties before the later gathering, which will be, in a sense, the heir to all the errors and follies of that Congress of Berlin whose failure in dealing with the Eastern question has become a matter of proverb.

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## Clash of Ambitions

**THE chief difficulty in the Near East arises out of the clash of rival ambitions, and this has been the case for nearly two centuries, during which the Eastern question has been a nightmare to European statesmen.**

**The most selfish and sordid page in modern history is that filled with the veracious accounts of the fashions in which the civilized nations of the West have bartered away honor and life in the Near East for illusory profits or vain guarantees of personal security.**

**But this difficulty has survived the war. To-day the French and British, united by the most splendid effort of any two allied nations in world history, have been well nigh estranged again and again by the old rivalries in Syria. The familiar atmosphere of intrigue and chicanery has again descended.**

**In this situation certain American voices are raised to urge that America take the field and that our obvious unselfishness will eliminate any misunderstanding of our motives.**